

## EDUC 6604 Course Project: A Teacher Study

### Relevant Course Objectives:

5. Teacher candidates will identify and describe appropriate classroom learning environments that enhance the teaching-learning process.  
**CCCT: 2.1, 2.2, 2.4, 2.5, 4.1, 4.3; INTASC: 5; UNH: 7b**
6. Teacher candidates will identify methods for the evaluation and assessment of learning and teaching.  
**CCCT: 3.4, 4.5, 4.6, 5.3, 5.4; INTASC: 8; UNH: 8b**
7. Teacher candidates will demonstrate an understanding of the cyclical relationship among learning objectives, instruction, and assessment practices in the k-12 classroom.  
**CCCT: 3.1, 3.2; INTASC: 7; UNH: 7a, 8c**
8. Teacher candidates will analyze classroom behaviors for the purpose of communicating academic and behavior performance expectations and results with students, their families, and other educators.  
**CCCT: 2.1, 2.4, 5.6; INTASC: 5; UNH: 5a, 5b, 9a**

### Project Overview

Please share this project information with your supervising administrator. After reviewing the assignment with you, if the administrator has any questions, s/he may contact me at: [abozack@newhaven.edu](mailto:abozack@newhaven.edu) or 203-932-7039.

### **Project Description:**

Teaching is both an art and a science. For several decades, educational researchers have studied the qualities of effective teaching. Teacher education programs such as this one focus on providing pre-service teachers with exposure to those qualities. Connecticut has used the research on effective teaching to identify six domains of teacher performance it expects teachers to develop (CCT Foundational Skills). In Connecticut, beginning teachers in their first few years of teaching are also required to engage with these qualities as part of the licensure process (via TEAM).

This project provides you with an initial opportunity to familiarize yourself with some of the foundational teaching skills domains identified in the CCT and to study the real work of teachers.

### CCT Domains explored in the teacher study:

Domain 2: Classroom environment

Domain 3: Planning for active learning

Domain 4: Instruction for active learning

Domain 5: Assessment for learning

*See the 2010 Connecticut Common Core of Teaching: Foundational Skills for complete domain information.*

### Teacher Participation & Description:

Select ONE teacher that you would like to engage with throughout this project—preferably a teacher whom has been identified as exemplary by building administrators or other teachers and is willing to assist you. If necessary, you may engage with multiple teachers if one teacher is not available to assist in completing the entire assignment. I suggest working with one teacher throughout the project but I understand that sometimes flexibility is necessary. See me privately if you have any concerns about your situation. I am happy to help when possible.

This project requires you to conduct multiple instructional observations of your selected teacher and engage in several instructionally-related conversations with the teacher. Observations will be roughly 20-40 minutes in length, depending on the class. You will take notes during the observation that will allow you to address specific aspects of the project related to the teacher, students, and classroom. You will also engage in a series of short question-based conversations with your teacher regarding his/her work relative to the CCT domains. You should take brief notes during your conversation and write a detailed account afterward. Conversations may be between 5-20 minutes in length (estimated) and should take place at the convenience of the teacher (e.g., at lunch, on recess duty, or during a planning time). Because you and the teachers are very busy, you should PLAN AHEAD so that you can complete the project components on time.

Some UNH class time will be allotted to discuss observations and conversations, develop questions, and to share your experiences with classmates. *Information shared with classmates and the instructor will be kept confidential; information will only be used to further the learning of pre-service teaching engaged in the UNH program.*

**It is important for you, your administrator, and the selected teacher to know that UNH wants you to see good teaching in action and to have the opportunity to converse with teachers about their practice. In the hustle-and-bustle of life in schools, this may not happen organically, and that is why we have developed this assignment. It is not meant to criticize the work being done in schools; rather, it is an opportunity for you to see how great teachers connect their professional knowledge with their classroom practice. We hope that this will help you develop the skills necessary to become a reflective practitioner yourself.**

This project will be separated into “bite size” components, with each section having its own due-date. One section of this project will be completed in your Classroom Management class. Though you will submit it for grading in that class, you will include your insights about classroom climate in your final project reflection. The final reflection that summarizes your learning from the project will be due at the end of the term (see weekly schedule for the exact dates).

## **Part 1: Introduction**

Education does not happen in a vacuum, and yet it is often discussed and debated as though it does. The environment in which families live and students learn and teachers teach impacts what living and learning and teaching look like in that place. Similarly, the quality of teachers is often discussed in broad, sweeping terms, yet teachers have varying backgrounds that impact their personal teaching philosophy and the way they approach the teaching profession. Part 1 of the project is designed to help you explore the environmental context in which your school is located and to provide details about the teacher's background. This contextual information will help you interpret your observations and interviews later on.

The main question you will answer through your introduction is: *What are the educational and social implications for the students at this school, given the context you've described?*

**Introduce your school.** Information you provide should paint a clear picture of the community and school in which your teacher works. Conversation starter questions to help you understand the learning context include:

- Where is the school located?
- What are the demographics of the student body? (e.g., ethnicity, socioeconomic status)
- Are parents actively involved in the school (volunteering, PTA, etc.)?
- How would you describe the security at the school?
- What types of before/after school programs are offered?

*These questions are only a starting point; I expect you to add to this list and provide a comprehensive description of the school. The answers to these questions will also meet some of the First Trimester Child Study requirements.*

**Introduce your teacher.** Information you provide should help me understand the teachers' background and why you have chosen to engage with this teacher for this project. Conversation starter questions include:

- When/where did the teacher obtain his/her teacher training?
- How long has the teacher been teaching in this district/school/grade-level/subject-matter?
- In addition to teaching, what other roles does the teacher have in the school?
- What is the greatest challenge this teacher had in his/her professional career?
- What is the teacher's greatest success or proudest accomplishment?

*These questions are only a starting point; I expect you to add to this list and include information that provides an initial understanding of the person as an educator. These questions will also meet some of the requirements for the portion of the project that will be submitted in your classroom management class.*

The introduction should be roughly 4-5 pages in length, typed, double-spaced, and fluently and professionally written. It should be free of grammatical and spelling errors.

## **Part 2: Planning and teaching for active learning**

Part 2 of the teacher study requires you to look at the relationship between the CCT Domains 3 and 4—planning for active learning and teaching for active learning. The surest way to have a successful class is to plan for it. Beginning teachers often make the mistake of planning too broadly or too narrowly, which can result in not being sufficiently prepared during actual instruction. Here, you have the opportunity to explore how your selected teacher plans for instruction, prepares for instruction, and implements those plans.

### **Action Steps:**

1. Engage your selected teacher in a pre-observation conversation about an upcoming lesson (preferably, one that you will be able to observe). For that conversation, focus on questions that will provide you with evidence of competencies related to Domain 3. Think about the type of questions you will want to ask related to Domain 3. Example questions include:
  - What part of lesson or unit planning is determined for you, what part is done as part of a team, and what parts do you do on your own?
  - With the lesson I plan to observe, what do you anticipate will be the biggest challenge and why? Can you plan to minimize that challenge?
  - How do you incorporate differentiated activities or outcomes in your lesson planning?
  - Do you think about how you will assess students when you are planning your lessons?
  - How much time did you spend on planning when you first started teaching? How much time do you spend planning now?
  - When I come to observe this lesson, what should I expect to see?

*These questions are only a starting point; I expect you to add to this list based on your reading of the CCT competency and based on your developing understanding of lesson planning.*

2. Conduct an observation of your teacher during a lesson. Preferably you will observe a lesson that coincides with the topic/unit/lesson discussed in your conversation. Look for overlap or discrepancies between your conversation and your observation.
  - Take general notes about the lesson structure and classroom management.
  - Be sure to look for evidence of competencies described in Domain 4
  - Note aspects of the lesson that seem to go especially well/poorly
  - How closely does the lesson resemble the conversation you had about planning?
  - How does the teacher incorporate formative assessment in the lesson? Does the teacher use this information in determining how to proceed?
  - Are the students active learners? How many students are on task?
  - Jot down any questions you want to ask the teacher later.
3. Engage in a follow-up conversation. Example questions include
  - Did the lesson unfold as you had anticipated it would? Were there any surprises?
  - What did you think were the strengths of the lesson?
  - Were there any aspects of the lesson that you had to change “on the fly” or that you would change next time? To what do you attribute that?
  - Do you think the students achieved what you wanted them to achieve in that lesson? What are the clues that make you think that?

*These questions are only a starting point; I expect you to add to this list in ways that reflect what you saw in your observation.*

Written Outcome:

The written description of Part 2 will include the following:

1. An overview of CCT Domains 3 and 4, and the research that supports them. (Demonstrate that you understand the purpose of the domains and the research on which they are based.)
2. A description of your conversation with the teacher regarding planning for instruction and teaching, and how that information informs your observation. (Attach conversation starter questions)
3. A summary of your classroom observation. (i.e., what you saw; attach observation notes)
4. Summarize your observation and post-observation conversation; show a connection to Domain 3 and 4 competencies. Include where you could see connections between your pre-observation conversation and classroom practice/behaviors, or where there were discrepancies.
5. A description of the insights you have gained through your study of Domains 3 and 4 and questions that you still have regarding the relationship between planning and instruction.

Your written summary should be 5-7 pages in length, typed, double-spaced, and fluently and professionally written. It should be free of grammatical and spelling errors.

### **Part 3: Assessment for learning**

As a student yourself, you've been an "apprentice of observation" (Lortie, 1975) for much of your life. Your roughly 13,000 hours of classroom time (before college) has given you some insight. But the process of student assessment takes place mostly behind a curtain; critically important but mostly unobserved by students. As such, pre-service teachers often feel overwhelmed when they are asked to engage with assessment-related content—it is a novel construct for which you have a limited schema. Now, more than ever before, teachers are being asked to use assessments as a way to gauge past teaching success, future instructional practice, and differentiated/universal exploration of content. Some assessments are being used to rank teachers and schools, to determine merit pay, and to determine instructional effectiveness. Regardless of the use or how you feel about them, implementation of and decision-making based on student assessments will be a part of your life as a teacher. Here, you have the opportunity to learn more about the practice of assessment, explore how your selected teacher frames his/her thinking about assessment and how s/he uses assessment to improve students' learning.

#### **Action Steps:**

1. Ask your teacher to review with you samples of student work, preferably from the lesson or unit that you observed and for which you discussed planning. It could be a writing sample, a multiple choice quiz, a test, or a project—anything that is formally assessed.
2. Ask your teacher to walk you through how s/he assesses this type of student work. (e.g., are rubrics used?)
3. Ask additional questions related to assessment. For example:
  - How do you determine what students are struggling with?
  - At what point would you go back and re-teach something to the whole class or individual students?
  - What type of feedback do you give on assignments like this, and why do you do it that way?
  - How do you grade students who try really hard but who also struggle academically?

*These questions are only a starting point; I expect you to add to this list based on your reading of the CCT competency and based on your developing understanding of assessment.*

#### **Written Outcome:**

The written description of Part 3 will include the following:

1. An overview of CCT Domain 5 and the research that supports it. (Demonstrate that you understand the purpose of the domain and the research on which it is based.)
2. A description of the student work you and the teacher discussed.
3. A summary of your discussion and how the teacher responded to your questions. Did you see clear evidence that the teacher's thinking and behavior is impacted by Domain 5?
4. Any discrepancies between what was taught and what was assessed (if you saw the lesson), and/or and similarities or discrepancies you noticed with the assessment practices you are learning about in your coursework.
5. A description of the insights you have gained through your study of the domain and the teacher you have selected to work with.

Your written summary should be 5-7 pages in length, typed, double-spaced, and fluently and professionally written. It should be free of grammatical and spelling errors.

**Part 4: A Great Place to Learn**

**PART 4 OVERLAPS WITH EDUC 6681-CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT. THIS ASSIGNMENT WILL BE SUBMITTED IN THAT CLASS AND GRADED BY THAT INSTRUCTOR. YOUR SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS FROM THIS ASSIGNMENT SHOULD BE REFLECTED IN PART 5, THE PROJECT CULMINATION.** *Students not currently enrolled in EDUC 6681 should conduct the conversations and observations described below, but no written assignment is due. The observations and summary should be included in the culminating section, Part 5.*

The purpose of this activity is to become familiar with one of the domains of effective teaching that all teachers in CT must demonstrate. Therefore, successful completion of this assignment is dependent on your ability to examine the competencies and use these to guide your interview and observations as well as to inform your conclusions

**Action Steps:**

1. Identify a teacher who has a reputation for being an exemplary teacher who successfully engages students in learning and who creates a positive learning environment.
2. Develop a series of questions based on our class discussions and topics that include the competencies identified in Domain 2 of the CCCT.
3. Conduct a minimum of two observations of the teacher and take notes relative to the classroom environment, teacher behaviors and student behaviors. *Identify both positive and negative interactions.* Be sure to look for evidence of the competencies identified in Domain 2.

**Written Outcome:**

**Introduction** – describe the school, demographics, etc

- Introduce the teacher – how long has he/she been teaching, what role(s) does the teacher have in the school other than teaching
- Explain why you have selected this teacher to interview

**YOUR EDUC 6681 INSTRUCTOR WILL NOT HAVE THIS INFORMATION. IT IS OKAY TO USE THE SAME INFORMATION (COPY/PASTE) THAT YOU WROTE FOR PART 1 OF THE TEACHER STUDY.**

**Body** – summarize CCCT Domain 2 to demonstrate you understand the purpose of the domain

- Describe your conversation with the teacher that shows a clear connection to the competencies of Domain 2. (Include a copy of the questions you asked)
- Summarize your observations and show a connection to Domain 2 competencies.
- Comment on the observations discussing teacher strengths and weaknesses.
- Include your findings on positive and negative teacher/student interactions.
- Include discussion of how the teacher behaviors did/did not support the conversation you had with the teacher.
- Did you see clear evidence that the teacher's thinking and behavior is impacted by Domain 2?

**Conclusion** - based on your knowledge of Domain 2 as well as your conversations with and observations of the teacher, what insights have you gained about the impact of environment on learning?

### **Part 5: Culmination**

This final part of the project gives you an opportunity to demonstrate your understanding of teaching practice and the skills needed to be a successful teacher. You do not need to re-submit Parts 1-4 or revisions unless requested by your instructor. Because of that, the culmination should stand on its own, as an independent piece of writing.

#### **Action Steps:**

Have a wrap-up conversation with the teacher you have observed to tie up any “loose ends” questions you may have or to discuss any topics that are important to you but that may not have been covered in the assignment.

#### **Written Outcome:**

The written description of Part 5 will include the following:

1. An overview of parts 1-4 of the project (1-3 paragraphs that summaries each part in a cohesive way).
2. Information from any additional conversations where you may ask questions outside of the strict purview of the CCT domains we explored (attach the questions). These questions should help fill in any gaps in your understanding or provide you additional enlightenment regarding any specific interests you have.
3. You will also summarize what you learned from engaging in this project. To help you examine your past and present beliefs about education, you should provide a written reflection to the prompt, *“I used to think....and now I think....,”* regarding the practice of teaching.
4. Additional insights that resulted from and suggestions for changes to this project are also encouraged in the reflection.

This final summary should be 5-7 pages in length, typed, double-spaced, and fluently and professionally written. It should be free of grammatical and spelling errors.